Beam-induced Back-streaming Electron Suppression Analysis for an Accelerator Type Neutron Generator Designed for $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ Geochronology

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Abstract

A facility based on a next-generation, high-flux D-D neutron generator has been commissioned and it is now operational at the University of California, Berkeley. The current generator designed for $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating of geological materials produces nearly monoenergetic 2.45 MeV neutrons at outputs of 10^8 n/s. The narrow energy range is advantageous relative to the ^{235}U fission spectrum neutrons due to (i) reduced ^{39}Ar recoil energy, (ii) minimized production of interfering argon isotopes from K, Ca, and Cl, and (iii) reduced total activity for radiological safety and waste generation. Calculations provided show that future conditioning at higher currents and voltages will allow for a neutron output of over 10^{10} n/s, which is a necessary requirement for production of measurable quantities of ^{39}Ar through the reaction $^{39}\text{K}(n,p)^{39}\text{Ar}$. A significant problem encountered with increasing deuteron current was beam-induced electron back-streaming. Two methods of suppressing secondary electrons resulting from the deuterium beam striking the target were tested: the application of static electric and magnetic fields. Computational simulations of both techniques were done using a finite element analysis in COMSOL Multiphysics[®]. Experimental tests verified these simulations. The most reliable suppression was achieved via the

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implementation of an electrostatic shroud with a voltage offset of -800 V relative to the target.

Keywords: Neutron generator, backstreaming electrons, electron suppression, electrostatic shroud, geochronology

1. Introduction

The neutron energy spectrum from D-D neutron generators has been shown by [1] to be optimal for irradiation of samples for $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ geochronology. The average energy and the narrow range of neutron energies from the $^2\text{H}(d,n)^3\text{He}$ fusion reaction allows for the production of ^{39}Ar with significant advantages over irradiation of these samples in ^{235}U fission reactors for reasons enumerated by [1]. Therefore, a customized neutron generator was designed and built for such purpose.

The High Flux Neutron Generator (HFNG) located at the University of California Berkeley is designed around two radio frequency-driven multi-cusp ion sources that straddle a titanium-coated water cooled copper target, as shown in Figure 1. Positively charged deuteron ions are accelerated up to 125 keV from the ion sources and self-load into the target. Upon target saturation, neutron generation occurs through the $\text{d}(d,n)^3\text{He}$ fusion reaction. In order to take advantage of the fact that the highest neutron flux is in the forward direction with respect to the beam, a sample holder slot is located in the center of the target at a distance of 8 mm from the location where the deuterium ions strike the target and generate neutrons. A detailed description of the design and operation of the HFNG is being prepared for publication.

As deuterium ions extracted from the ion source strike the target, ionization occurs at the surface, releasing secondary electrons. According to a study done in [2], approximately 1.2 electrons are emitted per deuterium ion striking a titanium target at 100 keV. Secondary electrons emitted from metal surfaces have energies around 10 eV, and typically not more than 30 eV [3]. Secondary electrons accelerate away from the target due to the negative electric potential,

Figure 1: HFNG cross section exposing target, shroud, and ion sources. For scale, the ion source is approximately 19 cm in diameter.

26 resulting in an electron beam that strikes the extraction plate. The collision of
 27 this secondary electron beam with the extraction plate result in the emission
 28 of bremsstrahlung X-rays. If the current density is large enough, melting can
 29 occur. Collision of electrons with any insulators inside the vacuum chamber
 30 will result in charge build-up, which over time will discharge in the form of an
 31 arc. If arcing is frequent, damage to the high voltage power supply can oc-
 32 cur. Lastly, secondary electrons represent a leakage current to the high voltage
 33 power supply, making it difficult to accurately determine the contribution of
 34 current from deuterons compared to secondary electrons. Suppression of these
 35 electrons is vital for continuous operation of a neutron generator. Two methods
 36 of suppressing electrons were tested on the HFNG: using magnetic fields pro-
 37 duced by permanent magnets and using an electric field created by installing an
 38 electrostatic shroud. Analysis results were first published in [4].

39 **2. COMSOL Multiphysics[®] Finite Element Simulation Overview**

40 COMSOL Multiphysics[®] was used to model the electrical and magnetic
 41 fields within the HFNG vacuum chamber [5]. COMSOL Multiphysics[®] uses
 42 the macroscopic form of Maxwell's equations to determine the magnetic and
 43 electric fields.

44 The fields are computed by using a finite element analysis over a meshed ge-
 45 ometry. User entered boundary conditions include the electric potentials at the

Figure 2: Neodymium magnet holders. (a) Photo of the magnet holders clamped to target cooling tubes. (b) CAD drawing, top view, showing neodymium magnets.

46 surface of a material, and the remanent flux density (B_r) of magnets. Charged
 47 particle trajectories can then be computed by COMSOL Multiphysics[®] by ap-
 48 plying the forces on the particles due to the calculated magnetic and electric
 49 fields. Corrections to the electric field are made using an iterative process to
 50 fold in the effect of space charge of the beam. The simulations were performed
 51 under non-relativistic conditions since relativistic effects are negligible within
 52 this energy range.

53 3. Magnetic Suppression

54 One method of electron suppression involves the use of magnetic fields. Fig-
 55 ure 2 shows the implementation of large neodymium magnets on the HFNG
 56 target. The magnets are aligned with opposite poles facing each other, creating
 57 magnetic field lines parallel with the target surface. This causes ejected elec-
 58 trons to spiral around the field lines and back toward the target surface. It is
 59 worth noticing that the electron does not only feel the force due to the magnetic
 60 field, but it also feels the force of the electric field used to accelerate the deuteron
 61 ions. This net force results in an $E \times B$ drift, which causes an orthogonal drift
 62 of the electron with respect to the magnetic and electric fields.

Figure 3: Simulations of the (a) magnetic fields and (b) electric field

3.1. Electric and Magnetic Field Simulation Results

A COMSOL Multiphysics® simulation shows the strength of the magnetic field across the surface of the target in Figure 3a. The neodymium magnets were grade N50, giving them a B_r between 14.1-14.5 kG. The black arrows represent the direction of the magnetic field lines in the respective arrow location. The magnetic field strength at the center of the target is approximately 800 gauss. The field strength along the surface was verified using a Hall probe. The strength of the electrical field can be seen in Figure 3b, which shows a top view of the target assembly. The field is quite large near the corners of the magnet holders, approaching a value of 80 kV/cm. It is important to remain below the breakdown voltage in vacuum, which can be approximated by the following empirical relation [6]:

$$E_{max} \left[\frac{kV}{cm} \right] = \frac{8000}{V [kV]} \quad (1)$$

where V is the extraction voltage and E_{max} is the maximum magnitude of electric field allowed. At 100 kV, the breakdown E-field becomes approximately 80 kV/cm.

Figure 4: COMSOL Multiphysics® electron path simulation

3.2. Simulation of Electron Trajectories Using Magnetic Suppression

Figure 4 shows the COMSOL Multiphysics® simulated electron paths, assuming three stripes of deuteron beams striking the center of the angled target.

The voltage of the target is -100 kV. The electrons liberated by the deuteron beams spiral up the target due to the $E \times B$ drift. When the electrons reach an area of weakened magnetic field, the electric field dominates and the electrons accelerate to the vacuum chamber wall. Experimental tests confirmed the electrons were colliding with the vacuum chamber wall exactly in the location shown by the simulation.

Further analyzing the simulation shows that when the electrons spiral back toward the target, they get close to the surface but do not collide. The magnetic force a particle feels is proportional to its velocity. The electron slows down as it spirals back toward the surface due to the electric field, causing the magnetic force to weaken. Ultimately, this is a consequence of the fact that as magnetic fields can only change the path of the electron and do not add energy, it is difficult for the electrons to overcome the electric field force and recombine with the target.

Figure 5: Circuit schematic of the diode assembly showing the $16\text{ k}\Omega$ resistor that reduces current flow during arcing in order to protect the machine

4. Electrostatic Shroud

An electrostatic shroud is a device that suppresses back-streaming electrons by introducing an opposing electric field near the target surface. This is done by installing a shroud around the target that is kept at a more negative potential. Locally, the resulting electric field is directed away from the target surface, causing electrons to be repelled from the shroud and return to the target.

The shroud design used for the HFNG is shown in Figure 6. The clamshell design allows for easy removal. Exchangeable face-plates allow for the ability to easily change the beam entrance window geometry. The voltage difference between the shroud and target is created through the use of multiple zener diodes in series, as shown in Figure 5. The total breakdown voltage of the zener diode chain was made as high as 2400 V.

4.1. Electric Field Simulation Results

Figure 7 shows the simulation of the electric field with the installation of the shroud design shown in Figure 6. In the simulation, the shroud voltage is -102 kV, while the target is at -100 kV. Installation of the shroud reduced the distance between the ground and high voltage, but by designing the shroud to have a large radius of curvature everywhere, and installing insulating spacers to move the ion sources back, it was possible to limit the electric field below the

Figure 6: Electrostatic shroud: (a) assembled, (b) exploded view

Figure 7: Electric field simulation outside shroud with target potential at -100 kV and shroud potential at -102 kV

114 80 kV/cm electrical breakdown limit determined earlier. The maximum electric
 115 field is approximately 47 kV/cm near the top of the shroud.

116 The minimum voltage differential between the target and shroud required
 117 to suppress electrons was determined by analyzing the electric field within the
 118 shroud. Figure 8 shows the magnitude of the electric field along the direction of
 119 the deuteron beam on the central plane within the shroud (same cross section
 120 plane shown in Figure 1). Red areas indicate regions where $E_z > 0$ and blue
 121 areas indicate regions where $E_z < 0$ (z is the direction along the deuteron
 122 beam). For a deuteron extracted from the top of Figure 7, the electric field
 123 will accelerate the deuteron downwards toward the target. When the deuteron
 124 enters the shroud and reaches the intersection of the red and blue region, it will
 125 have an energy of approximately 102 keV. The red region will then decelerate
 126 the deuteron to 100 keV. When the deuteron strikes the target surface and

Figure 8: Electric field direction near shroud window at (a) 400 V, (b) 800 V, (c) and 1400 V voltage differential. Red indicates field along the direction of the deuteron beam (shown by arrow), blue indicates direction opposite the deuteron beam. T and S denote the target and shroud, respectively.

127 ejects electrons, the electrons will feel the electric force pushing it back toward
 128 the target.

129 When designing the shroud geometry, one must ensure that the red region
 130 in the top of Figure 8 does not touch the target (as it does in Figure 8a), in
 131 order to prevent an electron from being ejected into an electric field that would
 132 accelerate the particle toward the vacuum chamber wall. Factors that affect the
 133 electric field within the shroud include the voltage differential and the distance
 134 between the shroud and target, as well as the window size.

135 4.2. Simulation of Electron Trajectories Using Electrostatic Shroud

136 A simulation of the secondary electrons released into 2π from a 1.3 mA
 137 deuterium beam striking the flat target surface is shown in Figure 9. Assuming
 138 1.2 electrons released per deuteron ion striking the target, this results in 1.56
 139 mA of electrons. As expected and described previously due to the electric field
 140 shown in Figure 8a, for a 400 V voltage differential between the shroud and the
 141 target, secondary electrons are not suppressed and leave through the shroud
 142 window in a beam that eventually strikes the chamber with an energy of 100
 143 keV. A shroud voltage differential of 800 V results in the electrons returning
 144 to the surface of the shroud, as seen in Figure 9b. The maximum energy the
 145 electron receives is equal to the energy at release.

Figure 9: Cutaway view of secondary electron trajectories with shroud differential voltages of (a) 400 V and (b) 800 V at 100 kV target potential

Testing of the shroud at 800 V voltage differential or greater on the HFNG has shown a large reduction in the amount of secondary electrons hitting the vacuum chamber. After implementing the shroud, no visual sign of chamber heating could be seen during machine operation due to back-streaming electrons. Also, the dose of bremsstrahlung X-rays detected by a Geiger counter in the vault decreased by a factor of more than 20 compared to the magnetic suppression technique.

5. Conclusions

Two main methods of electron suppression were tested: using permanent magnets to bend electrons back to the target, and implementing an electrostatic shroud creating a suppressing electric field. Simulations of the permanent magnet design showed that even with magnetic fields surpassing 1000 gauss, electrons would migrate along the target due to the $E \times B$ force without coming into contact with the surface. When electrons would reach an area of lower magnetic field they would escape the target area and collide with the vacuum chamber wall. Experimental tests confirmed the electrons were colliding with

163 the vacuum chamber wall at the location shown in the COMSOL Multiphysics®
164 simulation.

165 Simulations of an electrostatic shroud showed full suppression of electrons
166 emitted from the target surface. For the chosen shroud geometry, a voltage
167 differential of -800 V or greater compared to the target resulted in successful
168 electron suppression. Experimental results with the addition of a shroud reduced
169 the back streaming electrons significantly to undetectable levels. Furthermore,
170 the dose due to bremsstrahlung x-rays in the HFNG vault was reduced by a
171 factor of more than 20. Analysis of both suppression techniques resulted in the
172 conclusion that the use of electric fields for electron suppression is more effective
173 due to the fact that electric fields add energy to the electron while a magnetic
174 field can only change its direction.

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